



Office of Civil Rights

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TIPS FOR USING A SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER

When should we use a sign language interpreter?

Interpreters facilitate communication between hearing and Deaf individuals during public tours, public hearings and other group situations such as meetings or presentations, or when communicating with a Deaf individual about detailed, lengthy, or complex information.

What is the role of the interpreter?

An interpreter's role is strictly that of a communication “tool”. It is the responsibility of an interpreter to relay communication between two parties via sign language and voice. Interpreters sign everything that is said and say everything that is signed. Per the Code of Ethics for interpreters, the interpreter is not permitted to voice personal opinions or enter the conversation.

Where can we locate an interpreter?

There are local resources that work with a number of interpreters, including ASL Interpreter Network and SignOn. (see page 4 for contact information) You may also establish your own list of qualified interpreters and contact them directly.

What information should we give to the interpreter service?

- Date, time, location and expected length of the assignment.
- Type of situation – public meeting, health services, legal proceedings, highly technical language, etc.
- Names of interpreters with whom the Deaf or Deaf-Blind individual prefers to work (Many people prefer to work with specific interpreters, based on their different skills and individual communication needs.)
- Particular communication needs the Deaf individual has noted – for example, American Sign Language (ASL), Pidgin Signed English (PSE), or Signed Exact English (SEE). Others may prefer an oral interpreter. Some Deaf-Blind individuals prefer a “tactile interpreter”.

The interpreter service will seek to match the skills of the interpreter with the requirements of the situation.

When do we need to get two interpreters?

It is difficult to interpret for more than an hour and a half, so if a meeting or event will last longer, it is recommended to have two interpreters. In these situations, the two interpreters will work on a rotating basis, taking turns every 15-20 minutes in order to remain fresh and provide effective, accurate communication.

How much do interpreters cost?

Fees can vary depending upon the type of interpreting required (office meeting, legal proceedings, or medical appointment) and the interpreter's certification level and experience. Fees are hourly, and most interpreters have a two-hour minimum charge. In addition, mileage, travel time and parking costs may be charged. Agree on fees with the interpreter or referral service before the service is performed. Fees should not be discussed with the Deaf person.

How do we alert customers and clients that interpreter services are available?

If you have arranged to have sign language interpreters at a public meeting or hearing, or other public event, you can display this symbol on your meeting notice or event flyer (available online at www.graphicartistsguild.org/resources/disability-access-symbols/).



It can take some time to make arrangements for interpreters, so you need to know ahead of time if interpreters are needed. On a public meeting or event notice or flyer, you may include a statement such as "Sign language interpreters will be provided on advance request. Please contact us at least two weeks before this event." However, if an individual misses the deadline, King County must still make an effort to get an interpreter, and often can be successful even with short notice.

Working with an Interpreter: Some Tips

Before the meeting starts, it is helpful to meet with the interpreter to explain what will be covered. Provide the interpreter with copies of the agenda and/or other print materials for review and to follow as the meeting progresses. Ask the interpreter about any additional needs, such as a glass of water, a comfortable chair, etc.

When setting up at the start of the meeting, allow the interpreter and the Deaf or Deaf-Blind individual to figure out the best positioning for each of you to ensure effective and comfortable communication.

Provide good lighting for the interpreter. If the interpreting situation requires darkening the room, auxiliary lighting is necessary so that the Deaf/Deaf-Blind person can see the interpreter. If a small lamp or spotlight cannot be obtained, check to see if room lights can be dimmed but still provide enough light to see the interpreter.

If it is a presentation or large group setting, solid color backgrounds are helpful for platform interpreting.

Treat the interpreter as a professional. Introduce the interpreter to the group and explain why he/she is attending. The interpreter should be given the same privileges as the other group members, for example, coffee or snacks provided.

Speak directly to the Deaf or Deaf-Blind person, not the interpreter. For example, say "Do you have anything you would like to add?" rather than "Does he/she have anything to add?"

Speak clearly, in a normal tone, and at a normal pace. If there is a problem with keeping up, the interpreter or the Deaf/Deaf-Blind person may ask the speaker to slow down or to repeat a word or sentence for clarification.

Direct eye contact. While direct eye contact is valued in one-to-one meetings, direct eye contact on the part of the Deaf/Deaf-Blind individual is not always possible, as the individual will need to watch as the interpreter signs.

Remember that the interpreter is a few words behind the speaker. Give the interpreter time to finish so that the Deaf/Deaf-Blind person can ask questions or join the discussion.

Permit only one person to speak at a time during group discussions. It is difficult for an interpreter to follow several people speaking at once. Ask for a brief pause between speakers to permit the interpreter to finish before the next speaker starts. It is helpful for people to raise their hands and wait to be called upon before they speak. Also, it is appropriate etiquette for each participant to state her or his name before speaking, so it is clear who is talking.

Schedule breaks during the meeting. It can be tiring for an interpreter to sign for a long time or for a Deaf/Deaf-Blind person to follow sign language or oral interpreting for lengthy periods. Talk with the interpreter about when to take brief breaks.

As a final courtesy, thank the interpreter after the service has been performed. If there have been any problems or misunderstandings, let the interpreter or referral service know. Also, ask the Deaf/Deaf-Blind person if the service was satisfactory. It is a polite gesture to inform the referral service of your satisfaction with the interpreter.

One Last Note ...

American Sign Language (ASL) is a language in its own right, with its own grammar, syntax and structure, which includes using body and facial expression. It is important to realize that you are dealing with two different languages and that it may be necessary to rephrase or repeat your point. It is helpful to use examples for clarification.

American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter Services

Qualification or endorsement. *We do not qualify or endorse particular vendors, but list them here as options for you. We invite your feedback on these vendors. If a vendor is unable to meet county performance requirements, let us know so we can update the list.*

Other sources? *If you know of other sign language interpreter agencies that have been a good resource for you, please let us know so we can add them to the list.*

ASL Interpreter Network

206-527-9555 Voice/TTY
info@aslnetwork.com

206-527-9557 Fax
www.aslnetwork.com

Request a sign language interpreter by calling or e-mailing. Provide your name, organization, date/time/location of the assignment, and a description of the meeting and/or event (for example, if the assignment is for a medical appointment, a group meeting, or a training session). They will confirm your request and the name of your interpreter(s).

SignOn

206-632-7100 Voice
terps@signonasl.com

206-632-0405 Fax
www.signonasl.com

206-632-7200 TTY

Provides on-site and video remote interpreting services. Request a sign language interpreter by telephone, fax, e-mail or online request form. Include details about the assignment (name, organization, date/time/location, and type of situation). The scheduler will confirm your interpreter. If you leave a message, they will respond within a day.

For interpreter referral centers elsewhere in Washington state,
check DeafWeb online at www.deafweb.org/signlang.htm#interp_referral.

King County Superior Court – Office of Interpreter Services

Provides interpreters for all foreign spoken languages and American Sign Language for hearings, trials and court-related programs in criminal, civil and family law matters. As resources are available, interpreter services may be provided to other King County agencies. Manager: Martha Cohen

206-296-9358 Voice 206-296-0986 Fax e-mail: ZZGrp, SC Interpreter Services

Some information in this handout is based on excerpts from the following:

Through an Interpreter, Rochester Institute of Technology and the U.S. Department of Education.

Use of Interpreters, Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Service (ADWAS).